

VZCZCXRO6076  
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ RUEHROV  
DE RUEHVI #0211 0431630  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 121630Z FEB 08  
FM AMEMBASSY VIENNA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9474  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS VIENNA 000211

SIPDIS

SIPDIS, SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN RESPONSE: DEMARCHE ON EU REGULATORY COMMITTEE  
FEBRUARY 12 VOTE ON BIOTECH CORN, COTTON, AND SOYBEANS

REF: STATE 13142

¶1. (SBU) On February 11, post sent reftel points to the Ministries of Agriculture, Economics, and Health. We followed up with Ingrid Frasl from the Ministry of Economics' Multilateral Trade Policy Unit, underscoring that it was important for Austria to allow the EU's biotechnology system now in place to function. We emphasized that EFSA has determined that the biotech varieties under consideration were safe. Austria needed to accept the scientific approval process in place.

¶2. (SBU) Frasl responded that the GoA agreed that the approval process needed to be scientifically based. However, Frasl argued that "science was not a precise field." EFSA opinions were important, but the EU should also consider other scientific data, Frasl opined. Member States, according to Frasl, were keen on improving EFSA.

¶3. (SBU) EconUnit Chief cautioned against a growing sentiment in the EU in general and in Austria in specific to ignore or procrastinate implementation of WTO rulings on agricultural biotech. It was important for the Ministry of Economy to ensure that broader free trade principles were taken into account in GoA inter-ministerial discussions.

¶4. (SBU) Frasl pointed out that agricultural biotech remained a politically sensitive issue because of the staunch opposition to GMOs throughout Austrian society. Moreover, there is absolutely no demand - from consumers or producers - to demonstrate more flexibility on GMOs. Austrian agriculture, according to Frasl, has established a profitable niche for its bio products.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: Opposition to biotech remains deep-seated in Austria. Austrian agro-business have profited from the barriers to agricultural biotech by concentrating on a range of organic products, both for the domestic market and for regional exports.

KILNER#